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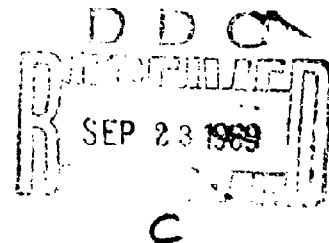
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Requirements for Organizational Leadership

by

Joseph A. Olmstead

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Prefatory Note

This position paper is concerned with the problems of changing requirements for the leadership of complex organizations. The conference for which it was prepared was jointly sponsored by the U.S. Military Academy and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, Department of the Army.

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REQUIREMENTS FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Joseph A. Olmstead

It is probably inevitable that the future will place even greater demands upon military leaders than does the present. The kinds of performance required of military organizations appear to be changing and, with shifting demands, leadership takes on greater complexity while also becoming more important. Accordingly, leaders of the future will have to be even more knowledgeable than those of the present.

Requirements for leadership have their bases in the kinds of performance demanded of organizations. As performance demands change, leadership requirements may also be modified. This paper addresses the problem of leadership requirements that are resulting from certain kinds of performance demanded of military organizations, present and future. Examination of this problem should provide better understanding of some of the considerations involved in developing leaders competent to meet the requirements.

Requirements for Organizational Performance

It is easy to establish organizations; it is not hard to get some performance from them. However, it is much more difficult to assure that established organizations operate at high levels of effectiveness, and, above all, consistently accomplish the missions for which they are constituted.

Present and future developments will make the task of organizational performance even more difficult. The necessity for continuous readiness and quick reaction in turbulent and unpredictable environments places a premium on the capability of organizations to respond flexibly to a continuous flow of uncertain situations. Yet, this must be accomplished in the face of technological advances in weapons systems, electronics, and logistics that complicate both organizational decision processes and the execution of tactical operations.

It appears that future organizations, encountering greater requirements for flexible response, will depend more upon fast acquisition, processing, and use of intelligence; speedy and accurate communication; flexible decision making; and swift reaction to external pressures. In general, although continuing to rely upon doctrine, policies, and procedures to guide decisions and actions, organizations must also possess capabilities to search out, accurately identify, and correctly interpret the properties of operational situations; to solve problems relevant to these situations; and to react appropriately to rapidly changing situational demands.

Thus, emphasis shifts to the necessary role of the organization as a problem-solving, decision-making, and action-taking system (1, pp. 41-46). To be effective in this role, an organization must possess a number of identifiable characteristics:

- (1) Capacity to evaluate reality. A responsive organization must possess the ability to obtain accurate information about conditions in the operational situation, including conditions both external and internal to the unit. Furthermore, it must be able to correctly interpret the information obtained and to understand its relevance to operations.
- (2) Capacity to learn. A responsive organization must possess the capacity to continuously gather information relative to its own actions and performance, analyze it, feed the information back to itself, and change the organization's activities according to what has been learned.
- (3) Open and efficient communication. In addition to the capacity to generate information about both external and internal conditions, a responsive organization must communicate the information validly and reliably within the unit. There must be a flow from one part of the unit to others of all relevant information important for each decision and action.
- (4) Adaptability. A responsive organization must possess the capacity to solve problems, react flexibly to changing demands, and adapt readily to unanticipated events. It must be pliable enough that efficient shifting of both individual and unit assignments is possible without undue stress and lost motion. Thus, procedures cannot be so rigid that adjustments to new situations become excessively laborious. Furthermore, over-formalism and strong dependence upon individual leaders should not exist to the extent that responsibility cannot be easily shifted when requirements change or leaders are lost.

Organizational capabilities such as those described have their bases in certain processes by which the organization identifies, solves, and adapts to changing problems that arise in the environments (1, p. 55). The capacity of an organization to identify, solve, and adapt to operational problems derives in part from the formal body of doctrine, policies, and procedures intended to guide decisions concerning which functions should be performed, in part from the adequacy of techniques and equipment that dictate how the functions should be performed, and in part from the skills of individuals to perform them. However, neither the logic of decisions, the adequacy of techniques and equipment, nor the competence of individuals in executing technical operations are, in themselves, sufficient to result in a responsive and adaptive system of decision and action. A remaining essential element is the dynamic processes concerned with the integration of information and decisions and the coordination of activities.

Examples of these dynamic processes are the ways that (a) objectives are identified, interpreted, and communicated; (b) information is obtained, processed, and disseminated; and (c) activities of key personnel are fitted together. Also included are the processes involved in reaching and implementing decisions, and those used for obtaining feedback on the results of actions taken. It is important to note that factors being discussed are not static and inanimate organizational attributes such as structure, procedure, or equipment, but, rather, dynamic processes that have their sources in the capabilities and interactions of personnel. These processes influence the problem-solving, decision-making, action-taking functions of organizations and derive from the unique social-psychological attributes of each specific unit (2, pp. 103-106).

The responsive organizations of the future will rely upon thinking individuals at all levels. Such personnel may be assisted by sophisticated equipment; however, the essential determinant of effectiveness will be the extent to which they can be finely tuned to the requirements of their roles and closely integrated into viable and sensitive systems of decision and action.

The challenge for present and future leaders is to find ways of developing such organizations and of maintaining them in a continuous state of dynamic effectiveness.

Requirements for Leadership

Leadership of the responsive organizations of the future will require more than merely a highly personalized, inspirational relationship between leaders and followers. Leadership has its inspirational side; however, emphasis upon this aspect tends to prevent identification of the actual skills required to elicit effective performance from the complex organizations characteristic of a modern army (3).

In organizations, leadership is a tool for achieving objectives. Individuals are placed in positions of authority over others to ensure the performance of activities that will result in mission accomplishment. Leadership is exercised in order to obtain desired performance, and, accordingly, success must be judged in terms of what the organization accomplishes.

The performance of an organization depends upon the activities of its members. If the organization is to achieve its objectives, each individual must perform the duties assigned to him and his activities must fit with those of other individuals so that all contribute most effectively to the ultimate goal. Since the purpose of leading is to maximize performance, leaders must induce subordinates to carry out those activities that will contribute most to success of the mission. This requires action on the part of the leader. Therefore, leadership involves actions that will influence individuals, both separately and collectively, to behave in a desired manner.

Leadership is a relationship; whether a leader's action has the desired effect will be partly determined by how subordinates feel

about him and his actions. Since relationships develop over periods of time, the degree to which a given leadership action will exert the desired influence is partly dependent upon what has occurred in the past. Therefore, leadership is also a process. It is something that happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization's distinctive history, the people who have been members, the groups it presently contains, and the nature of its activities.

Accordingly, *leadership is the process of influencing the actions of individuals and organizations in order to obtain desired results.* In this definition, the key is "influence." An individual may be well-liked and personally admired; however, if he does not make a difference in the organization, he cannot be called an effective leader. On the other hand, he may be personally disliked, but, if his actions produce effects in others that are useful to the organization, he could be considered a valuable leader.

The effectiveness of any process can be judged only in terms of the results obtained. Accordingly, each leadership act, each leadership decision, and each deliberation of leadership problems must have as a first consideration its effect upon performance. What is more, the ultimate criterion of effective leadership can only be the quality of performance demonstrated by the organization's personnel, both individually and as a unit. In military organizations, a commander can justify his existence only by the results he obtains. Considered in terms of leadership, this means that the commander has failed if he does not influence his personnel to perform the assigned duties. He has failed if he does not improve, or at least maintain, the performance capabilities of the organization entrusted to him. Performance remains, of necessity, both the aim and the proof of his leadership.

Influence in Organizations. Effective performance by an organization is not made possible simply by formal definition of authority and responsibility. Formal definitions and their accompanying procedures coordinate positions or specialized activities, not persons. The formal structure can never anticipate all the actions of individual members, and the relations outlined in an organization chart provide only a framework within which fuller and more spontaneous human behavior takes place. Limitations of ability, fluctuations in motivation, blockages in communication, personal conflicts, failures in coordination, and other problems may disrupt the ideal pattern of performance and relationships stipulated by organization charts and directives. Therefore, it is the role of leadership to transform an engineered technical arrangement of individuals and units into a functioning entity. If maximal accomplishment is to be obtained, the leader must be able to influence this system of activities and relationships so that it performs effectively.

The exertion of influence on an organization is a complex task (4, pp. 224-225). In a modern military organization, influence is exercised through an intricate system of authority and responsibility. Each level of command leaves an extensive area of discretion to the level below. Even the lowest ranking soldier exercises a considerable measure of judgment in determining his particular actions in a specific

situation. This does not mean, however, that the discretion of the soldier is limited only by the commands given him. He is also governed by doctrine, by standard operating procedures, and by other principles and concepts that provide guidance about how he should perform his duties. Furthermore, as he executes his duties, he is influenced by his training, motivation, morale, organizational loyalty, and other such factors not easily controlled by on-the-spot supervision.

It is apparent that a great variety of influences operate to guide the actions of every soldier. Most of these influences have their source in some aspect of the organization of which the individual is a member. The kinds of training he has experienced, his relationships with other men and with his superiors, the morale in the unit, the degree of esprit de corps, and the extent to which the organization functions smoothly and competently—all of these organizational factors influence performance. These are also factors over which a leader can exercise influence or control.

Leading an Organization. When the variety of factors that influence performance is recognized, it becomes apparent that leadership involves far more than the capacity to mobilize personal support in the ranks. Collective behavior is effective only to the extent that all individuals at all levels make useful contributions to achievement of the ultimate objectives. Leadership includes manipulation of whatever organizational conditions may influence such contributions.

Studies of the bases of leadership show one theme constantly recurring (5). The leader who has the most competence is the one who recognizes the essential purpose of leading and keeps this purpose clearly in mind in all of his activities. For the military leader, the purpose can only be to promote effective performance by his personnel so that missions can be successfully executed. This can be accomplished through the creation of organizational conditions and relationships that will both stimulate and permit effective performance by his personnel.

The concept of the leader as one who creates conditions for effective subordinate performance is somewhat different from the notion of the leader standing alone at the head of his unit, playing a role of single-handed mastery of an organization, and pulling reluctant subordinates along in the shadow of his overpowering personality. The critical difference lies in recognition that much of the performance of individuals in organizations is determined by conditions within which they must function. Since commanders control the organizational conditions within which subordinates perform, the conclusion is obvious. The greatest contribution a leader can make is the creation of conditions that will be conducive to effective subordinate performance.

According to this concept, the leader instead of seeing himself solely as "the boss"—one who plans, organizes, controls, and decides by himself—must also think of himself as a resource to his organization, an expert in communication, and a catalyst to his subordinates. A major function is one of facilitating as well as directing, of maintaining a healthy flow of clear communication "up and down" instead of merely issuing orders, of relating himself to all segments

of his unit in such a manner that the total effort is greater than the sum of its parts.

Effective performance of the role described here may place some especially complex demands upon the leader. Foremost among these is the necessity for constantly being aware of the relatedness among the many factors that influence organizational performance. In approaching a leadership situation, many people "see" only the leader, or the subordinates, or the problem. Yet, in reality, one is rarely confronted with the simple relation of a leader to a subordinate or a group of subordinates. Instead, a great many relations are frequently joined in a network. To seize upon one or two factors as a basis for action and neglect the rest is usually a gross oversimplification.

A military unit is an organizational system (6). The basic notion of a system is that it is a set of interrelated parts—a molecule a system of atoms, a person a system of organs, a group a system of individuals. Implicit in these concepts is a degree of "wholeness" that makes the whole something different from, and more than, the individual segments considered separately.

Considering an organization as a system offers many benefits. Two, in particular, have special relevance for leadership. First, a systems viewpoint focuses on the relatedness of activities carried on by different individuals and subunits. Because each part of a system affects and is affected by every other part, the essence of the leader's job is not simply to solve individual problems in specific areas, but, rather, to achieve some measure of integration among the many subsystems that form his command.

Second, a systems viewpoint emphasizes the fact that behavior in organizations is usually the outcome of many determinants operating interdependently. Leaders are sometimes prone to consider such elements as missions, objectives, morale, discipline, and esprit de corps to be independent factors, each contributing to performance on the basis of direct cause-effect relationships. On the other hand, a systems view recognizes the mutual dependence of various contributing factors. The structure of the organization affects and is affected by the missions of the unit. Missions affect and are affected by morale. Conditions of morale affect and are affected by esprit de corps. Morale and esprit de corps affect and are affected by discipline.

Thus, a change introduced that affects morale will be accompanied by changes in discipline and esprit de corps; a change introduced into discipline will be accompanied by changes in morale and esprit de corps. Similarly, a change introduced into missions will have its effects upon organizational structure, morale, and discipline. Changes in morale, discipline, or structure will result in changed mission accomplishment. It is the interrelation of these elements that constitutes the total pattern of the organization, which is what the leader attempts to influence.

An effective organization is a unified system equipped with the knowledges and skills to respond to and control its environments,

while an ineffective organization, for the lack of such capabilities, remains subject to forces over which it can exert little control. In the same way, an effective leader is one who understands his organization and the sources that influence it, while the ineffective leader, because of the lack of such understanding, is the victim of such forces which act beyond the range of his limited capacity to control them.

Successful leaders operate effectively because of a knowledge both of organizational requirements and of how the human elements in their organizations may be combined, balanced, and directed toward ultimate objectives. This knowledge is accompanied by recognition that the problems of leadership have infinite variety and no two can be solved by exactly the same approach. Each leadership situation is new, requiring imagination, understanding, and skillful action. Therefore, what is needed for the leadership of responsive organizations is not a set of rules or techniques, but (a) knowledge of the factors that influence performance in organizations, (b) an attitude that emphasizes the relatedness both of subparts and of factors that influence performance, and (c) good skills both in assessing situations and in providing appropriate actions based on the prediction of potential consequences.

Requirements for Developing Leaders

Leadership of the responsive organizations of the future will embody a major responsibility for creative action. For such organizations to be effective, leading cannot be simply passive reaction to problems as they occur; leadership must go beyond merely "fighting fires" as they arise within the organization. Instead, it will be necessary for leaders to actively strive to shape their units and to constantly push back the limitations that both human fallibility and potential organizational rigidity tend to place upon the units' capabilities to perform responsively.

Under these conditions, the effectiveness of a leader rests upon his ability to sense the constantly changing currents in his organization; to recognize particularly sensitive areas; to plan, initiate, and carry through changes in the organizational environment; and, most important, to lead and direct his unit in such a manner that serious problems do not arise. All of these call for a constant awareness of the human and organizational factors in day-to-day operations and skill in successfully adapting to a variety of situations that may arise because of these factors.

For these reasons, effectiveness will require sophisticated individuals who are well-versed in the fundamentals of leadership and thoroughly schooled concerning human factors that influence the performance of organizations. Leadership will have to be more than a matter of "hunch" or native ability, backed by some elementary concepts and reinforced through the trial-and-error of experience. Instead, it must rest upon systematic knowledge and a rational and conscious application of sound principles and practices.

The development of leaders who are so equipped is not an impossible task. Knowledge of leadership and organizations has advanced to the stage where its fundamentals can be analyzed, organized systematically, and learned by most individuals with normal abilities. Leadership, although complex, can be taught, when there is a willingness to allocate the necessary resources and training time to the task.

On the other hand, genuinely effective training for leadership can never be easy because leadership is too closely related to the attitudes and personal ways of thinking and behaving of each individual. For this reason, people do not seem to learn leadership skills from mere "appreciation" courses or from being told how they should behave. Training that is seriously intended to develop effective leaders must be as specifically designed and as genuinely relevant as instruction that is provided in other military subjects.

The implications for future training are clear. First, increased formal instruction in leadership will be necessary. Leaders of the future will require explicit frames of reference from which they can approach the problems of guiding complex organizations. Such frames of reference can be acquired only through direct analysis of the concepts and problems involved. Accordingly, it will be necessary to provide extensive, in-depth instruction aimed directly at inculcating understanding both of leadership and of the human and organizational factors that influence it.

Second, realistic leadership laboratories will be necessary. Students must be provided opportunities to actually have the experience of interaction with other people, to try out new skills, and to obtain feedback in terms of the effectiveness of their experimental behaviors. However, such training cannot be fully effective if conducted only as adjunct to instruction in other subjects. Although potential leaders need opportunities to practice while conducting everyday activities, practice should be preceded by carefully designed laboratory situations where students can try out new behaviors under conditions where mistakes do not have serious consequences.

Finally, such training must, of necessity, be highly intensive. To be genuinely effective, leadership training must be a process of reorientation and of the acquisition of new concepts, attitudes, and skills. Students must be provided the opportunity to discard old ideas about human behavior and to acquire new ones, to discard old prejudices and to develop more constructive attitudes about their roles as leaders, and to learn and practice the kinds of new skills they will need to implement their new understanding. Changes such as these can be accomplished only when students become deeply involved in the training process. Accordingly, training experiences are required that will result in complete and total commitment of the student to the development of leadership skills. Total involvement is presently generated in some types of military training—for example, the Airborne course, where the trainee is immersed for three weeks in nothing but acquisition of the skills of parachuting. Training of similar intensity should be devoted to leadership.

Conclusion

The leadership of a modern organization involves more than the capacity to generate favorable attitudes among personnel, although this is an essential aspect. It is also more than steering the organization by the routine solution of everyday problems, although this, too, is essential. As the performances required of organizations become less programed and more adaptive, leadership becomes increasingly complex because a different orientation is necessary. In the future, leaders at all levels must be concerned with building and guiding responsive systems of decisions and actions. It is in this realm of building and guiding responsive systems that the distinctive quality of future leadership will be found.

The development of leaders who possess the needed capabilities may be a difficult task, but not an impossible one. What appears to be required is recognition of the organizational role of leadership and design of educational and training programs specifically attuned to that role.

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13. ABSTRACT The requirements for leadership of complex organizations, present and future, are described. The changing performance demanded of military organizations, and the implications for developing leaders who will have the necessary capabilities are discussed. Since the performances required of military organizations are becoming more adaptive, the distinctive quality of future leadership will lie in ability to develop and guide responsive systems of decision and action. Developing of future leaders will require recognizing the organizational role of leadership and designing training programs specifically attuned to that role.		

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